



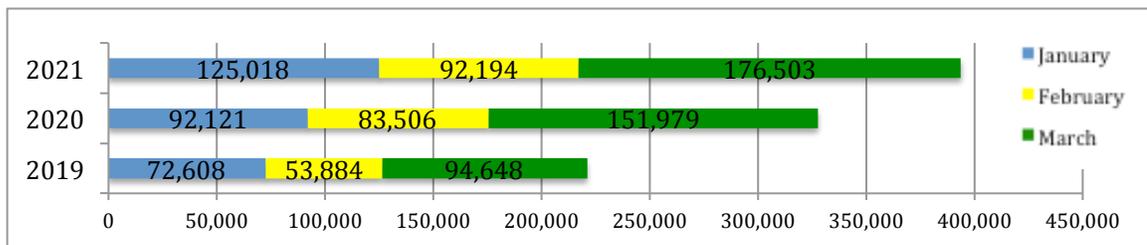
MONTANA FWP

## 2021 Montana State Parks Visitation for Q1

As of May 20, 2021

### Key Takeaways

- There were an estimated **393,175 state park visitors** during the first quarter of 2021. When compared with last year, this represents an increase of **20.2%**, or a net gain of an estimated **66,109** visitors. When compared with 2019, this represents an increase of **78%**, or an estimated **172,525** more visitors.

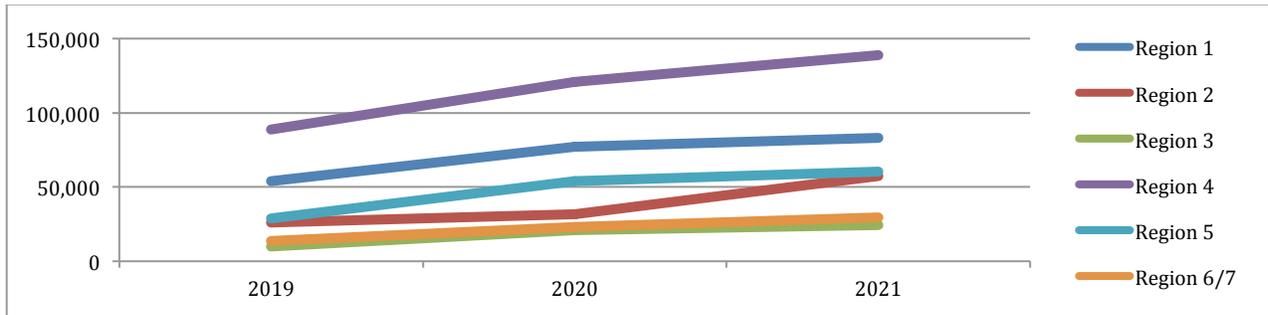


- During this first quarter, relatively mild weather in January and March fueled much of the estimated increases whereas February's cold streaks led to some slowing of visitation. The bitter temperatures that month, however, did not deter visitors from ice fishing in several parks.
- Day use and camping occupancy are projected to rise across the state in the spring and summer. Of the 40 state parks that were seasonally open during this period, **80%** experienced an increase in estimated visitation compared with last year. Meanwhile, six experienced a decline, albeit small in some instances, and two were temporarily closed.
- There were a handful of special events hosted by parks around the state that led to spikes in visitation such as volunteer gatherings, ice-fishing derbies, and in the case of Frenchtown Pond, a February COVID-19 vaccination clinic.
- The largest net visitor gains in the first quarter occurred in **Region 2**, headquartered in Missoula. There were an estimated **25,467** more visitors in this region compared with last year. Growth was largely driven by Travelers' Rest State Park, which saw an estimated **10,429** more visitors than in 2020.
- Compared with last year, camping during the first quarter was an estimated **18%** higher. There were a total of **543** camping nights across the state this year compared with an 461 in 2020. Camping reservations are at an all time high.

*\* Please see report notes at the end of this document for information about the state park system's methodological practice and a summation of recent updates to the estimation approach.*

## 2019-21 First Quarter Visitation (By State Park Administrative Region)

The below graph depicts how visitation during the first quarter has trended since 2019 for each of the state park administrative regions. Collectively, Regions 1 and 4, headquartered out of Kalispell and Great Falls respectively, represented **56.4%** of total visitation for the state during the past month. Last year was a record-setting one for the Montana State Park system, in spite of some initial shutdowns in the year promulgated by COVID-19. It appears this year will be even busier, based on anecdotes from park staff, tourism professionals, and others in the travel and outdoor recreation industries.



REGION	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	% of Q1 2021 statewide total
<b>Region 1</b>	53,825	77,042	83,208	21.1%
<b>Region 2</b>	26,011	31,849	57,316	14.6%
<b>Region 3</b>	9,962	21,095	24,516	6.2%
<b>Region 4</b>	88,802	120,820	138,927	35.3%
<b>Region 5</b>	28,863	53,787	60,297	15.3%
<b>Regions 6/7</b>	13,677	23,013	29,451	7.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>221,140</b>	<b>327,606</b>	<b>393,715</b>	

### FEATURE: Stewarding our State Parks One by One

Montana State Parks AmeriCorps (MSPA) members are front line ambassadors of our incredible state park system. MSPA members play a critical role in using parks as living laboratories to teach children and adults about the wonders of science, nature, culture and history. Additionally, AmeriCorps members are often a new generation of stewards for state parks, conducting land improvement projects that can range from removing noxious weeds, to repairing trails or even planting native trees.

During the first quarter, MSPA members delivered more than **100** public educational and interpretive programs that have been attended by an estimated **1,567** adults and **1,470** youth. AmeriCorps members also helped restore more than **100** acres of state park land and improved more than **nine** miles of trails that are important to the recreational interests of Montana's communities, small and large.



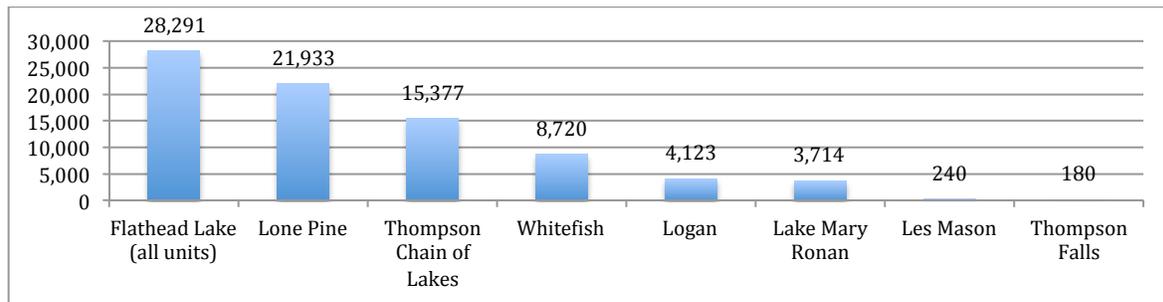
## A region-by-region glimpse

### Region 1

Region 1 saw an estimated **83,208** visitors across its eight parks reporting visitation figures during the first quarter of the year. This represents an estimated **8.0%** increase in visitation (or **6,166** more visitors) compared with last year, and **21.1%** of the state's total visitation. Compared with 2019 levels, this represents an estimated **29,383** more visitors, or a **54.6%** increase.

Flathead Lake was the third most visited park in the state during the first quarter; Lone Pine was sixth; and, Thompson Chain of Lakes was tenth. Of the state park administrative regions, Region 1 experienced the second highest level of visitation. Growth in the region's visitation did not appear to be as hampered by cold weather as much as in other regions with a number of staff noting that ice fishing derbies lured visitors to state parks.

### Estimated 2021 First Quarter Visitation



**NOTE:** Includes Flathead Lake being counted as one park, comprised of six units. Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at the N. Shore unit of Flathead Lake. Also of note is that the gates at the vehicular entrances of Les Mason and Thompson Falls have been seasonally closed during the first quarter, thus estimates solely reflect walk-in visitors.

### Region 1 - State Park estimates (First Quarter)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q12021 visitation figures

Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
<b>Flathead Lake (all units)</b>	16,633	29,619	28,921	-698	-2.4%
<b>Lone Pine</b>	14,730	23,512	21,933	-1,579	-6.7%
<b>Thompson Chain of Lakes</b>	10,893	11,750	15,377	3,627	30.9%
<b>Whitefish</b>	5,838	5,482	8,720	3,238	59.1%
<b>Logan</b>	2,771	2,306	4,123	1,817	78.8%
<b>Lake Mary Ronan</b>	2,780	4,073	3,714	-359	-8.8%
<b>Les Mason</b>	90	180	240	60	33.3%
<b>Thompson Falls</b>	90	120	180	60	50.0%
	<b>53,825</b>	<b>77,042</b>	<b>83,208</b>	<b>6,166</b>	<b>8.0%</b>

## Region 1 - Flathead Lake Unit Estimates (First Quarter)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q12021 visitation figures

Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
<b>FL-Wayfarers</b>	10,663	18,244	16,915	-1,329	-7.3%
<b>FL-Big Arm</b>	2,869	3,526	5,052	1,526	43.3%
<b>FL-West Shore</b>	1,729	2,440	3,912	1,472	60.3%
<b>FL-Yellow Bay</b>	1,272	1,175	2,917	1,742	148.3%
<b>FL-Wild Horse Island</b>	40	74	65	-9	-12.2%
<b>FL-Finley Point</b>	60	4,160	60	-4,100	-98.6%
	<b>16,633</b>	<b>29,619</b>	<b>28,921</b>	<b>-698</b>	<b>-2.4%</b>

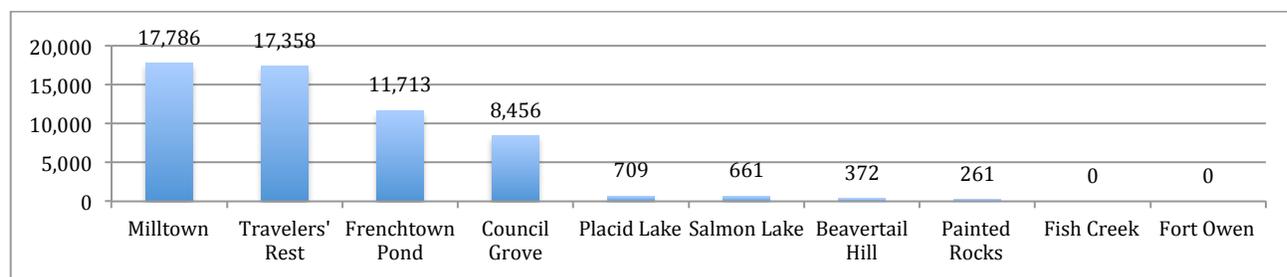
*NOTE: The entrance gate is seasonally closed during much of the winter at the Finley Point unit of Flathead Lake. Last year's weather allowed for opening the gate more frequently.*

## Region 2

Region 2 saw an estimated **57,316** visitors across its nine parks reporting visitation figures during the first quarter of the year. This represents an estimated **80.0%** increase in visitation (or **25,467** more visitors) compared with last year and a **21.1%** of the state's total visitation. Compared with 2019 levels, this represents an estimated **31,305** more visitors, or a **120.4%** increase.

Nearly all parks in Region 2 experienced an increase in visitation during the first quarter -- Milltown was the eighth most visited park in the state during this time period, while Travelers' Rest was ninth. The spike in visitation can be attributable to a few matters: the addition of counting devices installed at two entrances at Milltown that heretofore had not been included in the Region's visitation data. Additionally, a February COVID-19 vaccination clinic was hosted at Frenchtown Pond, drawing in numerous local residents. These things considered, the overall regional increase in visitation is notable considering there are three parks that remain seasonally closed - Beavertail Hill, Salmon Lake, and Placid Lake; and, the temporary construction closure at Fort Owen.

### Estimated 2021 First Quarter Visitation



*NOTE: Visitation data at Fish Creek was not regularly reported in 2020 or 2021. Also of note is that Fort Owen has been temporarily closed for construction; and, campgrounds at Beavertail Hill, Salmon Lake and Placid Lake have been seasonally closed.*

### Region 2 - State Park estimates (First Quarter)

*State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q12021 visitation figures*

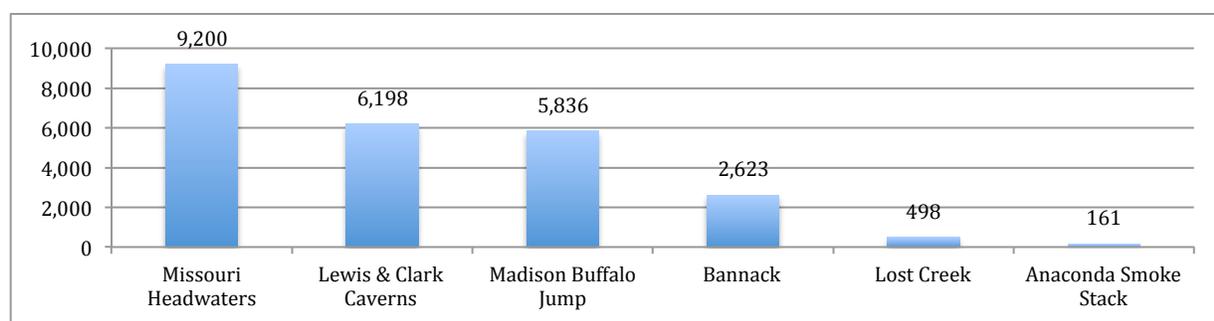
Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
<b>Milltown</b>	4,609	8,229	17,786	9,557	116.1%
<b>Travelers' Rest</b>	5,293	6,929	17,358	10,429	150.5%
<b>Frenchtown Pond</b>	6,350	7,005	11,713	4,708	67.2%
<b>Council Grove</b>	6,944	7,361	8,456	1,095	14.9%
<b>Placid Lake</b>	1,004	652	709	57	8.7%
<b>Salmon Lake</b>	793	517	661	144	27.9%
<b>Beavertail Hill</b>	199	259	372	113	43.6%
<b>Painted Rocks</b>	219	323	261	-62	-19.2%
<b>Fort Owen</b>	406	574	0	N/A	N/A
<b>Fish Creek</b>	194	0	0	0	N/A
	<b>26,011</b>	<b>31,849</b>	<b>57,316</b>	<b>25,467</b>	<b>80.0%</b>

### Region 3

Region 3 saw an estimated **24,516** visitors across its six parks reporting visitation figures during the first quarter of the year. This represents an estimated **16.2%** increase in visitation (or **3,421** more visitors) compared with last year and **6.2%** of the state's total visitation. Compared with 2019 levels, this represents an estimated **14,554** more visitors, or a **146.1%** increase.

Weather was noted as having an impact on visitation by several Region 3 staff throughout the reporting period. Conditions did not seem to impede visitation at Lewis and Clark Caverns, however, while double-digit increases were also experienced at Madison Buffalo Jump, Bannack, and Lost Creek.

### Estimated 2021 First Quarter Visitation



*NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Beaverhead Rock or Granite Ghost Town. Also of note is that Clark's Lookout has been seasonally closed during the first quarter.*

### Region 3 - State Park estimates (First Quarter)

*State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q12021 visitation figures*

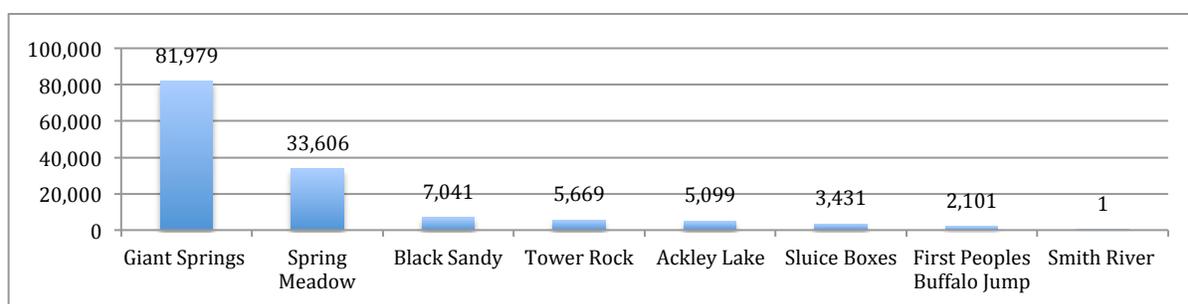
Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
<b>Missouri Headwaters</b>	3,525	10,342	9,200	-1,142	-11.0%
<b>Lewis &amp; Clark Caverns</b>	2,010	3,476	6,198	2,722	78.3%
<b>Madison Buffalo Jump</b>	2,076	5,002	5,836	834	16.7%
<b>Bannack</b>	2,143	1,918	2,623	705	36.8%
<b>Lost Creek</b>	78	204	498	294	144.1%
<b>Anaconda Smoke Stack</b>	130	153	161	8	5.2%
<b>Clark's Lookout</b>	0	0	0	0	N/A
<b>Granite Ghost Town</b>	0	0	0	0	N/A
<b>Beaverhead Rock</b>	0	0	0	0	N/A
	<b>9,962</b>	<b>21,095</b>	<b>24,516</b>	<b>3,421</b>	<b>16.2%</b>

## Region 4

Region 4 saw an estimated **138,927** visitors across its eight parks reporting visitation figures during the first quarter of the year. This represents an estimated **15.0%** increase in visitation (or **18,107** more visitors) compared with last year and **35.3%** of the state's total visitation. Compared with 2019 levels, this represents an estimated **50,125** more visitors, or a **56.4%** increase.

All Region 4 state parks saw increased visitation during the first quarter as compared with last year. Giant Springs was the state's most visited park during the first quarter while Spring Meadow Lake came in second. Their proximate locations to Great Falls and Helena, respectively, attract numerous local residents seeking to get outdoors.

### Estimated 2021 First Quarter Visitation



*NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Elkhorn or Marias River. Also of note is that the Smith River was seasonally closed for most of the first quarter.*

### Region 4 - State Park estimates (First Quarter)

*State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q12021 visitation figures*

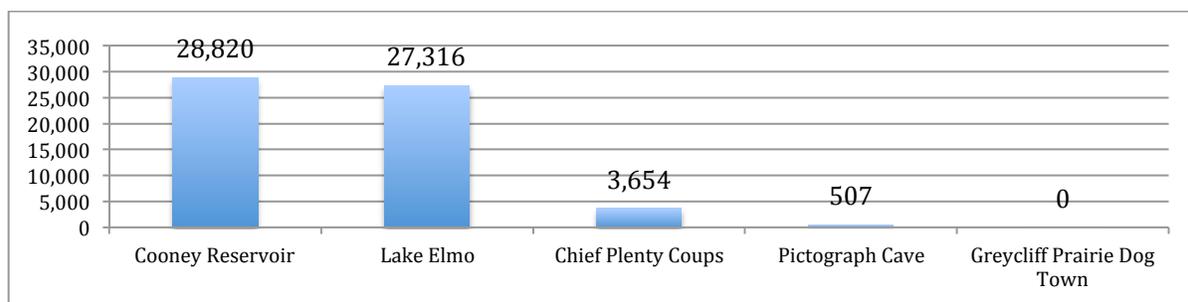
Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
<b>Giant Springs</b>	62,433	76,026	81,979	5,953	7.8%
<b>Spring Meadow</b>	17,432	28,441	33,606	5,165	18.2%
<b>Black Sandy</b>	2,726	4,348	7,041	2,693	61.9%
<b>Tower Rock</b>	1,598	4,837	5,669	832	17.2%
<b>Ackley Lake</b>	2,170	3,166	5,099	1,933	61.1%
<b>Sluice Boxes</b>	1,482	2,698	3,431	733	27.2%
<b>First Peoples Buffalo Jump</b>	961	1,304	2,101	797	61.1%
<b>Smith River</b>	0	0	1	1	N/A
<b>Elkhorn Ghost Town</b>	0	0	0	0	N/A
<b>Marias River</b>	0	0	0	0	N/A
	<b>88,802</b>	<b>120,820</b>	<b>138,927</b>	<b>18,107</b>	<b>15.0%</b>

## Region 5

Region 5 saw an estimated **60,297** visitors across its five parks reporting visitation figures during the first quarter of the year. This represents an estimated **12.1%** increase in visitation (or **6,510** more visitors) compared with last year and **15.3%** of the state's total visitation. Compared with 2019 levels, this represents an estimated **31,434** more visitors, or a **108.9%** increase.

Growth in visitation was experienced by nearly all Region 5 state parks during the first quarter as compared with last year. Cooney Reservoir was the fourth most visited park in the state while Lake Elmo was the fifth. Unfortunately, Pictograph Cave remained closed due to a rock fall that occurred in January. however, the park is anticipated to re-open in May.

### Estimated 2021 First Quarter Visitation



**NOTE:** Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at the Yellowstone River. Also of note is that Greycliff Prairie Dog Town has been seasonally closed during the first quarter; and, Pictograph Cave was temporarily closed on January 19 due to a rock fall.

### Region 5 - State Park estimates (First Quarter)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q12021 visitation figures

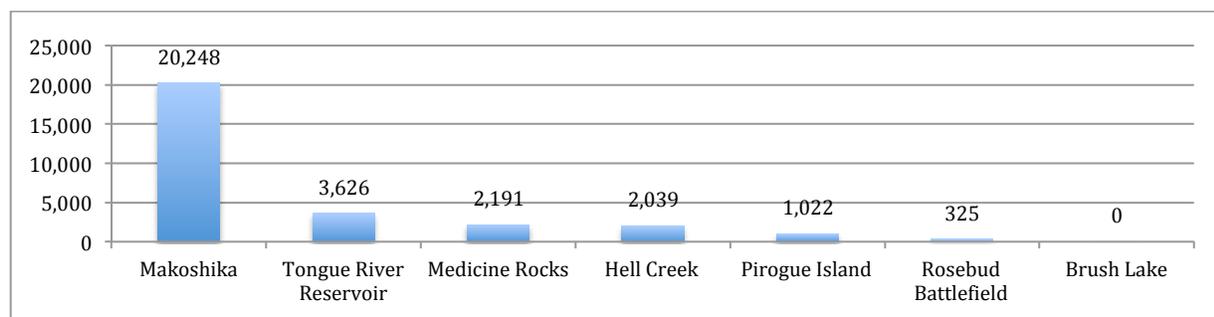
Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
<b>Cooney Reservoir</b>	13,577	19,175	28,820	9,645	50.3%
<b>Lake Elmo</b>	8,708	24,092	27,316	3,224	13.4%
<b>Chief Plenty Coups</b>	1,898	2,156	3,654	1,498	69.5%
<b>Pictograph Cave</b>	4,680	8,364	507	-7,857	-93.9%
<b>Greycliff Prairie Dog Town</b>	0	0	0	0	N/A
<b>Yellowstone River</b>	0	0	0	0	N/A
	<b>28,863</b>	<b>53,787</b>	<b>60,297</b>	<b>6,510</b>	<b>12.1%</b>

## Regions 6 and 7

Regions 6 and 7 saw an estimated **23,013** visitors across its six parks reporting visitation figures during the first quarter of the year. This represents an estimated **28.0%** increase in visitation (or **6,438** more visitors) compared with last year and **7.5%** of the state's total visitation. Compared with 2019 levels, this represents an estimated **15,774** more visitors, or a **115.3%** increase.

Nearly all state parks in Regions 6 and 7 experienced an increase in visitation during the first quarter as compared with last year, largely driven by growth at Makoshika. It was the seventh most visited park in the state in Q1. In addition to Makoshika, Medicine Rocks, Pirogue Island, and Rosebud Battlefield all experienced a double-digit increase over last year for the reporting period.

### Estimated 2021 First Quarter Visitation



*NOTE: Brush Lake has been seasonally closed during the first quarter.*

### Regions 6 and 7 - State Park estimates (First Quarter)

*State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q12021 visitation figures*

Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
<b>Makoshika</b>	7,040	15,304	20,248	4,944	32.3%
<b>Tongue River Reservoir</b>	3,570	3,465	3,626	161	4.6%
<b>Medicine Rocks</b>	531	1,106	2,191	1,085	98.1%
<b>Hell Creek</b>	1,849	2,230	2,039	-191	-8.6%
<b>Pirogue Island</b>	388	700	1,022	322	46.0%
<b>Rosebud Battlefield</b>	299	208	325	117	56.3%
<b>Brush Lake</b>	0	0	0	0	N/A
	<b>13,677</b>	<b>23,013</b>	<b>29,451</b>	<b>6,438</b>	<b>28.0%</b>

## All 2021 State Park Estimates (First Quarter)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q12021 visitation figures

Region	Park	Q1 Estimated Total
4	Giant Springs	81,979
4	Spring Meadow	33,606
1	Flathead Lake (all units)	28,921
5	Cooney Reservoir	28,820
5	Lake Elmo	27,316
1	Lone Pine	21,933
6/7	Makoshika	20,248
2	Milltown	17,786
2	Travelers' Rest	17,358
1	Thompson Chain of Lakes	15,377
2	Frenchtown Pond	11,713
3	Missouri Headwaters	9,200
1	Whitefish Lake	8,720
2	Council Grove	8,456
4	Black Sandy	7,041
3	Lewis & Clark Caverns	6,198
3	Madison Buffalo Jump	5,836
4	Tower Rock	5,669
4	Ackley Lake	5,099
1	Logan	4,123
1	Lake Mary Ronan	3,714
5	Chief Plenty Coups	3,654
6/7	Tongue River Reservoir	3,626
4	Sluice Boxes	3,431
3	Bannack	2,623
6/7	Medicine Rocks	2,191
4	First Peoples Buffalo Jump	2,101
6/7	Hell Creek	2,039
6/7	Pirogue Island	1,022
2	Placid Lake	709
2	Salmon Lake	661
5	Pictograph Cave	507
3	Lost Creek	498
2	Beavertail Hill	372
6/7	Rosebud Battlefield	325
2	Painted Rocks	261
1	Les Mason	240
1	Thompson Falls	180
3	Anaconda Smoke Stack	161
4	Smith River	1
		<b>393,715</b>

<b>NOTES:</b>		
<b>Region</b>	<b>Park</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1	Flathead Lake-N. Shore unit	Data not regularly collected
2	Fish Creek	Data not regularly collected
2	Fort Owen	Temporary closure
3	Beaverhead Rock	Data not regularly collected
3	Clark's Lookout	Seasonal closure
3	Granite Ghost Town	Data not regularly collected
4	Elkhorn Ghost Town	Data not regularly collected
4	Marias River	Data not regularly collected
5	Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	Seasonal closure
5	Pictograph Cave	Temporary closure
5	Yellowstone River	Data not regularly collected
6/7	Brush Lake	Seasonal closure

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**REPORTING NOTES:**

*Visitation data is typically based on reported estimates from 45 of Montana's 55 state parks. In the winter, some parks and/or campground entrances are seasonally closed. While the system does experience some off-season camping, numbers are generally low.*

*Staff members are currently working with experts at the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) to gain assistance with revising the system's visitation methodology. Additionally, park staff members are in the process of adding counting devices to entrances where either existing counters were nearing the end of their useful life, or there simply were not counters installed. In the first quarter, this occurred at two entrances of Milltown State Park, beginning in February.*

*It should also be noted that occasionally staff might determine the need to make slight revisions to previous month totals to improve accuracy.*

*For questions about this report, contact Kyan Bishop, Parks and Recreation Planner, at [Kyan.Bishop@mt.gov](mailto:Kyan.Bishop@mt.gov).*